

Buddhist teachings on Right Livelihood

Ratnaprabha, 2007

Right livelihood is ethical livelihood (the Buddha)

"And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong livelihood as wrong livelihood, and right livelihood as right livelihood. And what is wrong livelihood? Scheming, persuading, hinting, belittling, & pursuing gain with gain. This is wrong livelihood..."

"One tries to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter into right livelihood: This is one's right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter & remain in right livelihood: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities -- right view, right effort, & right mindfulness -- run & circle around right livelihood."

-- MN 117 (Thanissaro trs)

Monks, these five trades ought not to be plied by a lay-disciple... Trade in weapons, trade in human beings, trade in flesh, trade in spirits [intoxicants] and trade in poison. (*Gradual Sayings, AN 5.177*)

The Buddha's advice on working

To a Householder

"We, Lord, are laymen who enjoy worldly pleasure. We lead a life encumbered by wife and children. ...We deck ourselves with garlands, perfume and unguents. We use gold and silver. To those like us, ... let the Exalted One preach the Dhamma, teach those things that lead to weal and happiness in this life and to weal and happiness in future life."

Four conditions, Vyagghapajja, conduce to a householder's weal and happiness in this very life. Which four?

The accomplishment of persistent effort (*utthana-sampada*), the accomplishment of watchfulness (*arakkha-sampada*), good friendship (*kalyanamittata*) and balanced livelihood (*sama-jivikata*).

1. Herein, Vyagghapajja, by whatsoever activity a householder earns his living, whether by farming, by trading, by rearing cattle, by archery, by service under the king, or by any other kind of craft — at that he becomes skilful and is not lazy. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to carry out and allocate (duties). This is called the accomplishment of persistent effort.
2. Herein, Vyagghapajja, whatsoever wealth a householder is in possession of, obtained by dint of effort, collected by strength of arm, by the sweat of his brow, justly acquired by right means — such he husbands well by guarding and watching so that kings would not seize it, thieves would not steal it, fire would not burn it, water would not carry it away, nor ill-disposed heirs remove it. This is the accomplishment of watchfulness.
3. Herein, Vyagghapajja, in whatsoever village or market town a householder dwells, he associates, converses, engages in discussions with householders or householders' sons,

whether young and highly cultured or old and highly cultured, full of faith (*saddha*), full of virtue (*sila*), full of charity (*caga*), full of wisdom (*pañña*). He acts in accordance with the faith of the faithful, with the virtue of the virtuous, with the charity of the charitable, with the wisdom of the wise. This is called good friendship.

Herein, Vyagghapajja, a householder knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income.

Just as the goldsmith, or an apprentice of his, knows, on holding up a balance, that by so much it has dipped down, by so much it has tilted up; even so a householder, knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income.

(From the *Dighajanu Sutta*, *Anguttara Nikaya* VIII.54, translated by Narada Thera.)

To Sigalaka

And how, young householder, does a noble disciple, cover the six quarters?

The following should be looked upon as the six quarters. The parents should be looked upon as the East, teachers as the South, wife and children as the West, friends and associates as the North, servants and employees as the Nadir, ascetics and brahmins as the Zenith....

In five ways should a master minister to his servants and employees as the Nadir:

- (i) By assigning them work according to their ability,
- (ii) By supplying them with food and with wages,
- (iii) By tending them in sickness,
- (iv) By sharing with them any delicacies,
- (v) By granting them leave at times.

The servants and employees thus ministered to as the Nadir by their master show their compassion to him in five ways:

- (i) They rise before him,
- (ii) They go to sleep after him,
- (iii) They take only what is given,
- (iv) They perform their duties well,
- (v) They uphold his good name and fame.

The servants and employees thus ministered to as the Nadir show their compassion towards him in these five ways. Thus is the Nadir covered by him and made safe and secure.

[*From another part of the Sutta:*] ... There are, young householder, these six evil consequences in being addicted to idleness: he does no work, saying:

1. That it is extremely cold
2. That it is extremely hot
3. That it is too late in the evening

4. That it is too early in the morning
5. That he is extremely hungry
6. That he is too full.

Living in this way, he leaves many duties undone, new wealth he does not get, and wealth he has acquired dwindles away....

(From the *Sigalavada Sutta*, DN 31, translated from the Pali by Narada Thera.)

The Four Appropriate Happinesses

"Herein, householder, these four kinds of happiness are appropriate for one who leads the household life and enjoys the pleasures of the senses. They are the happiness of ownership, the happiness of enjoyment, the happiness of freedom from debt, and the happiness of blamelessness.

"What is the happiness of ownership (*atthisukha*)? A son of good family possesses wealth that has been obtained by his own diligent labour, acquired through the strength of his own arms and the sweat of his own brow, rightly acquired, rightly gained. He experiences pleasure, he experiences happiness, thinking, 'I possess this wealth that has been obtained by my own diligent labour, acquired through the strength of my own arms and the sweat of my own brow, rightly acquired, rightly gained.' This is the happiness of ownership.

"And what is the happiness of enjoyment (*bhogasukha*)? Herein, a son of good family consumes, puts to use, and derives benefit from the wealth that has been obtained by his own diligent labour, acquired through the strength of his own arms and the sweat of his own brow, rightly acquired, rightly gained. He experiences pleasure, he experiences happiness, thinking, 'Through this wealth that has been obtained by my own diligent labour, acquired through the strength of my own arms and the sweat of my own brow, rightly acquired, rightly gained, I have derived benefit and performed good works.' This is called the happiness of enjoyment.

"And what is the happiness of freedom from debt (*ananasukha*)? Herein, a son of good family owes no debt, be it great or small, to anyone at all. He experiences pleasure and happiness, reflecting, 'I owe no debts, be they great or small, to anyone at all.' This is called the happiness of freedom from debt.

"And what is the happiness of blamelessness (*anavajjasukha*)? Herein, a noble disciple is possessed of blameless bodily actions, blameless speech, and blameless thoughts. He experiences pleasure and happiness, thinking, 'I am possessed of blameless bodily actions, blameless speech, and blameless thoughts.' This is called the happiness of blamelessness.

"When he realizes the happiness of being free from debt, he is in a position to appreciate the happiness of owning possessions. As he uses his possessions, he experiences the happiness of enjoyment. Clearly seeing this, the wise man, comparing the first three kinds of happiness with the last, sees that they are not worth a sixteenth part of the happiness that arises from blameless behaviour." [A.II.69, from a Ven. Payutto Web Page. *These four can be applied to your work, and summarised as: Joy in what you've got (enjoying the career and work that you already have, and the benefits you get from them, including financial); Joy in what you do with it (this is enjoying the products of your work --*

creativity and as well as material productivity); Joy in non-dependency; and Joy in a free heart. See the Jack Kornfield talk, reference below.]

Working in Buddhist teams

Defining TBRL

'Team-Based Right Livelihood Businesses' (TBRL) "were team-based because they consisted of a number of Buddhists working together. They worked together along broadly co-operative lines. And they were right livelihood businesses, because they operated in accordance with Buddhist ethical principles."

(Sangharakshita, *The integration of Buddhism into Western Society*, 1992)

" Team based right livelihood businesses have four distinguishing characteristics.

1. They provide those who work in them with a means of support. They do not pay wages or salaries, and they give each worker what he or she needs according to their individual circumstances.
2. They engage only in such activities that are ethical, ie. in accordance with the precepts. Moreover, the team based right livelihood businesses are run in an ethical manner, and the workers treat one another ethically.
3. They provide opportunities for the development of spiritual friendship within the work situation. [enumerated as number 2 in *The integration of Buddhism into Western Society* (1992): "they enabled Buddhists to work with one another".] This is particularly the case where the workers not only work together, but live together in a community.
4. Profits of the business are distributed as dana, for the benefit of FWBO/TBMSG activities of various kinds." [In *The integration of Buddhism into Western Society*: "they gave financial support to Buddhist and humanitarian activities".]

(Sangharakshita, *Looking Ahead a Little Way*, 1999 and *The Six Emphases of the FWBO*.)

"If anything is to be added [to the above four] it should be something to the effect that a right livelihood business would be one in which all the skills necessary for the success of the business were present - managerial and other skills." (*1987 Men's Order Convention Questions*)

Cooperative working

"If you have a co-op you've got a group of people who have equal responsibility in principle. That doesn't mean... that they're interchangeable in terms of skills, but... there are no employers and no employees regardless of the specific functions the individual members of the co-op are performing. So you've got a situation in which people all accept responsibility, and that isn't easy, because one usually finds within a group of people working together, that some ... take on less responsibility, which means that the others have to take on a bit more responsibility to take up the slack... Usually those who take on more responsibility are in the minority, those who take on less responsibility are in the

[majority]. Then those who take on less responsibility for the same reason that they take on less responsibility are resentful that other people have taken on more responsibility ... In this way resentment develops, all sorts of criticism develops and so on. So you need really, to have a co-op at all, a group of really mature and responsible people." they need to be concerned for the co-op as a whole, not just their job (at least full-timers). So probably only order members should work in our 'co-ops'...

"If you have to think in terms of a career, well think of it as a career within the Movement as a whole."

(Sangharakshita, *1987 Women's Convention*.)

It's not difficult to start an FWBO centre, it's more difficult to start a single-sex community, but the most difficult and demanding of all is to start a TBRL. "But it's also perhaps the most worthwhile of all because, ...in some cases you not only work with other people but you live with those same people and living with them and working with them, you can develop a very close spiritual friendship."

"You work best on your relationships within the Team by all of you, more and more devotedly co-operating for the fulfilment of the aims and objects of the business."

"I regard the [FWBO] housewife as, in a way, working, you might say, in a Team Based Right Livelihood project, perhaps on a rather small scale, depending on the number of children." (Sangharakshita, *Dhanakosa Opening Questions*, 1993)

Also, " the work situation is very important for developing a more virile kind of spiritual friendship."

"Unless they are manned entirely by stream entrants, all organisations and Movements will have an in-built tendency to degenerate. So err on the side of adherence to the ideal, if you have to err at all."

(Sangharakshita, *Windhorse Trading Right Livelihood Questions*)

Subhuti's five categories of right livelihood

1. Doing work that is not unethical.
2. Having contact with Buddhists in the same line of work.
3. Working with other Buddhists.
4. Setting up a Buddhist business, paying normal wages.
5. Team-based right livelihood with a semimonastic lifestyle.

(Summarised in: *Working Life, an Exploration of Right Livelihood*, Talk by Jnanavaca, London Buddhist Centre. *I would add number 1a, Vocational work, which might be altruistic or artistic.*)

Historical spiritual communities, especially in the 19th century in America

"Some of these communities developed business enterprises, and these business enterprises were quite successful, but they ended up absorbing all the energies of the

people involved, and the spiritual communities became, sometimes officially and legally, business corporations; one or two of which, I think, continue still. And the whole spiritual community side of [things was lost. Broadly, they failed because there was] no common way of life, no common spiritual practice, and no real emphasis on individual growth and development and on helping one another to grow and evolve; and no emphasis on the community as a situation with a structure which helps the individual to evolve."

(Sangharakshita, *Tuscany 82 Q&A*)

Team-Based Right Livelihood as spiritual practice

"If the work is ethical it's a spiritual practice. If the business is generating funds for dharma projects, for dana, obviously that's a spiritual practice. One might even say that if it's providing its workers with support, that's a spiritual practice. It's again a form of dana. And if it provides kalyana mitrata well certainly it's a spiritual practice." And you get your energies going through working hard. (Sangharakshita, *1987 Men's Order Convention Questions*)

Mindfulness and insight through working

Mindfulness is important, but would you necessarily develop more mindfulness, say, at Vajraloka that at work? "In your work there is an objective check up. You're made more quickly aware if you have been unmindful." "There is a constant means of checking, objectively, how well you are doing. Not only in business terms, but even to some extent in spiritual terms. You may not get that in a more relaxed and, as it were, spiritual situation, unless you have a very fiery Zen type master perhaps."

Insight at work? By its nature, insight doesn't depend on any particular set of conditions: it arises in dependence on non-Insight. The *Indian* tradition in particular says that Shamata is most conducive, but Zen provides many examples of insight in different situations. Nevertheless, an extreme situation, pushing you to the edge, is most likely to give rise to insight, whether you are meditating or not. Are you sometimes pushed to the edge at Windhorse Trading? "Maybe there are financial problems, and you tell yourself well yes there are these problems, but what is the challenge? Not to be disturbed, and just face the possibility of total failure with equanimity. ... That's the edge towards which you are being pushed. That you are not deep down really, ultimately concerned about success or failure. At least not in a personal sense." You can cultivate all the spiritual faculties at work, but to keep them healthy there are probably more specialised situations such as Puja and meditation and retreat and study which are also necessary, and are allowed for at Windhorse. Sangharakshita would take a daily meditation practice, the weekly chapter meeting, and one month of retreats each year as a minimum. If Windhorse was really a complete situation, why not commit yourself to it for life, as the Benedictines did in their monastery? Those not suited to it could found other kinds of right livelihood businesses, especially those involved with providing the essentials of life, especially food, clothing and housing. (Sangharakshita, *Windhorse Trading Right Livelihood Questions*)

Jack Kornfield's five aspects of right livelihood

1. Non-harming

Avoiding livelihoods that, for example, involve weapons, exploitation, drugs, or whatever hurts people; and helping others avoid them, too.

2. Appropriate happiness

(See above)

3. Growth and Awareness

'Waking up' in your livelihood. Practising mindfulness, and facing reality in your work.

4. Simplicity

Keeping your work uncomplicated and straightforward, using it to support a simple life, not consumerist.

5. Service

Seeing your livelihood in terms of offering benefit to others, acting in a loving and selfless way.

[I would add: 6. Fellowship: communication, friendship, kalyana mitrata, co-operation, empathy, Sangha etc.]

<http://www.cheraglibrary.org/buddhist/kornfield/jkliveli.htm>

Dogen on the Tenzo

The job of cook is an all-consuming pursuit of the way. If one lacks the way-seeking mind, it will be nothing but a vain struggle and hardship, without benefit in the end.

When washing rice, preparing vegetables, and so on, do so with your own hands, with close attention, vigorous exertion, and a sincere mind. Do not indulge in a single moment of carelessness or laziness. Do not allow attentiveness to one thing to result in overlooking another....

The ancients said that cooks regard [rolling] up their sleeves as the way-seeking mind.

Treat utensils such as tongs and ladles, and all other implements and ingredients, with equal respect; handle all things with sincerity, picking them up and putting them down with courtesy....

Do not argue with the store officers over the amount of ingredients you have received. Without worrying about their quality, simply make the best of what you have. ...

Even when, for example, one makes a soup of the crudest greens, one should not give rise to a mind that loathes it or takes it lightly; and even when one makes a soup of the finest cream, one should not give rise to a mind that feels glad and rejoices in it.

...When we work attentively, therein lies the principle that makes it possible to surpass our predecessors. That you still do not grasp the certainty of this principle is because your thinking scatters, like wild horses, and your emotions run wild, like monkeys in a forest. If you can make those monkeys and horses, just once, take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward, then naturally you will be completely integrated. This is the means by which we, who are [ordinarily] set into motion by things, become able to set things into motion. ...

Harmonizing and purifying yourself in this manner, do not lose either the one eye [of transcendent wisdom] or the two eyes [of discriminating consciousness]. Lifting a single piece of vegetable, make [yourself into] a six-foot [Buddha] and ask that six-foot body to

prepare a single piece of vegetable. Those are [the cook's] spiritual penetrations and magical transformations, his Buddha-work and benefiting of living beings. ...

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http://www.stanford.edu/group/scbs/sztp3/translations/eiheishi/translations/tenzo_kyokun/translation.html)

And an unsourced quote from Dogen: " when the cook takes the vegetable stems, it must be with the same power with which the Buddha turned the wheel of the Dharma..."

Right livelihood reading list

Author	Title	Subtitle	Publisher	Date	Notes
Badiner, Allan Hunt (ed)	Mindfulness in the Marketplace	Compassionate responses to consumerism	Parallax	2002	Essays on consumerism etc, mainly by various American Buddhists
Buchan, James	Frozen Desire	An Inquiry into the Meaning of Money	Picador	1997	Nature and history of money and its illusory nature. Not Buddhist.
Carroll, Michael	Awake at Work	35 practical Buddhist principles for discovering clarity & balance in the midst of work's chaos	Shambhala	2006	Based on Tibetan mind training, using slogans
Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler	The Art of Happiness at Work		Hodder and Stoughton	2003	Conversations with the Dalai Lama on job satisfaction etc
Inoue, Shinichi	Putting Buddhism to Work	A New Approach to Management and Business	Kodansha International	1997	Japanese businessman, mainly on Buddhist economics, a little on RL
Kinder, George	Seven Stages of Money Maturity	Understanding the Spirit and Value of Money in Your Life	Random House	1999	Vaguely Buddhist angle on understanding spiritual and psychological issues around money.
Kulananda & Dominic Houlder	Mindfulness and Money	The Buddhist Path to Abundance	Broadway Books	2002	
Lamont, Georgeanne	The Spirited Business	Success stories of Soul-friendly companies	Hodder and Stoughton	2002	Transforming your workplace to be more spiritual, with many case histories
Lewin, Roger and Birute Regine	The Soul at Work	Unleashing the power of complexity science for business success	Orion Business Books	1999	Business organisational dynamics, prioritising genuine relationships and mutual respect, connecting people to values.
Low, Albert	Zen and Creative Management		Charles Tuttle	1976 this ed 92	Solving management problems using Zen ideas
Maitland, Arnaud	Master Work	Master of time	Dharma Publishing	2000	Disciple of Tarthang. Communication, cooperation, responsibility, awareness & concentration; caring;

					mastering the flow of time.
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Padmasuri	Transforming Work	An experiment in Right livelihood	Windhorse Publicat'ns	2003	
Payutto, P A	Buddhist Economics	A Middle Way for the Marketplace	Buddha Dharma foundation	1994 (2nd edn)	Ethics of making money
Pratley, Peter	The Essence of Business Ethics		Prentice Hall	1995	Study text for managers
Richmond, Lewis	Work As a Spiritual Practice	How to bring depth and meaning to the work you do	Piatkus	1999	Buddhist approach, including the energy wheel, dealing with stress, worry, anger, boredom, failure etc and developing positive qualities.
Roach, Geshe Michael	The Diamond Cutter	The Buddha on managing your business and your life	Doubleday	2000	Business strategies from the Diamond Sutra
Simpson, Liz	Working from the Heart	A practical guide to loving what you do for a living	Vermilion	1999	Making work more fulfilling, vaguely Buddhist
Tarhang Tulku	Mastering Successful Work	Skilful means: wake-up	Dharma Publishing	1994	Making work into a path of realisation and transformation
Tarhang Tulku	Ways of Work	Dynamic action	Dharma Publishing	1987	Accounts of working for Dharma Publishing etc
Whitmyer, Claude (ed)	Mindfulness and Meaningful Work	Explorations in Right livelihood	Parallax Press	1994	Essays based on the eightfold path applied to work, mainly by American Buddhist teachers.
Witten, Dona and Akong Tulku Rinpoche	Enlightened Management	Transforming yourself -- and then your team -- for maximum success	Rider	1998	Applying Buddhist principles to managing

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